## **FORUM**

## ARS Science Serves Many Users

Clients. Customers. Stakeholders. These are all terms used in government now to describe the people who benefit from the "services" aspect of the Agricultural Research Service. I'd like to add another word—another concept—to that list: partners.

Clearly it is an essential function of ARS to serve the needs of our sister action and regulatory agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. But because we in ARS maintain certain core capabilities and expertise to respond to urgent national issues, it's clear we can also serve the needs of others beyond the agencies of USDA.

As you'll see in this issue's cover story, ARS scientists have maintained a longstanding partnership with the Department of Defense for developing insect repellants to protect U.S. military personnel against disease-bearing pests.

ARS scientists also have unparalleled expertise in bioremediation of pollutants in soil and water—a resource of great interest to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

These types of governmentwide partnerships are not only appropriate, but in the national interest. As a result of enhanced communications and coordination of science activities, we're giving American taxpayers a better return on their tax dollars.

We also reach outside USDA to our university partners, particularly but not exclusively within the land-grant university system, to set the national agenda for agricultural and food science research.

While our university partners are frequently concerned with more local and regional needs, we in ARS can provide the national perspective. But as it would be presumptuous of us to do this without active communication,

our partnership with this country's universities is vital.

Crop producers depend on ARS directly to increase production efficiency and product safety and to develop environmentally benign technologies. These research requests come to us frequently through commodity groups. We have been—and should continue to be—responsive.

But sometimes the connection isn't that obvious. We've also interacted directly, for example, with the Metropolitan Water Districts of Southern California and the American Water Works Association to deal with the potential risk of a health-threatening parasite called cryptosporidium in water supplies. We're able to provide that support based on ARS scientists' world-class expertise in this subject.

There are many sources of cryptosporidium other than agriculture. But if agriculture is a part of the problem, agricultural industries must be an active part of the solution.

Another area of tremendous importance is our direct interaction with consumers. ARS has enormous input in nutritional monitoring programs.

Our scientists are also hard at work on altering the composition of foods to make them more nutritious, such as developing leaner hogs. As the principal agency responsible for human nutrition research in this country, it's incumbent on us to reach directly to the consumer with our findings.

ARS also has international partners. This agency supports USDA and domestic agriculture in promoting the competitiveness of U.S. agricultural products and protecting them from exotic pests and diseases through research. Our principal function is to serve U.S. agriculture.

But there are occasions when working with other countries is in the best interests of U.S. agriculture. There's not a single instance of cooperation between ARS scientists and their in-

ternational counterparts in which we don't bring back something of value to American agriculture. We try to focus on countries where we can trade technology, science, and expertise.

Also, if the economic well-being of a particular nation is important to the national interests of the United States, we in ARS are strategic contributors. Often there are noncompetitive agricultural industries we can promote in those countries, such as certain unique floral and nursery crops in South Africa.

This not only results in a broader array of products from which the American consumer can choose, but also makes those countries better customers for U.S. products—including agricultural goods.

The mission of the Agricultural Research Service requires us to set some limits on what we do and whom we do it with. It's not within our mandate to get into areas that are well covered by other agencies or the public sector. And we always focus our attention on issues in agriculture and food sciences.

But within that framework, we have not only the opportunity—but the duty—to make the most of the public investment in our agency. It's the responsible thing to do, particularly when it relates to the mission of agriculture and USDA and is in the public interest and for the public good.

For these reasons, I will continue to be very supportive of applying the skills of ARS scientists to those issues that affect agriculture but might not fall strictly within the intramural programs of USDA agencies.

We must remember all our partners as we go forward in our search for new knowledge and technology.

## Flovd P. Horn

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